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NIO // MEMO

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

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1 August 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR: Recipients

SUBJECT: Soviet and PRC Reactions to US Nuclear Weapon
Employment Policy

1. The attached Assessment of Soviet and PRC reactions to US nuclear weapon employment policy with Supporting Analysis, is forwarded for your information. It was prepared by CIA in collaboration with the Bureau of Intelligence Research, Department of State; the Defense Intelligence Agency; and the National Security Agency. Other USIB agencies were afforded opportunity to comment on the paper in the course of its preparation.

2. The Assessment and Supporting Analysis were forwarded to the President in response to instructions in NSDM-242, "Policy for Planning the Employment of Nuclear Weapons," dated January 17, 1974.

W. E. Colby
W. E. Colby

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Soviet and PRC Reactions to
US Nuclear Weapon Employment Policy

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PREFACE

This study was prepared in response to instructions in National Security Decision Memorandum 242, "Policy for Planning the Employment of Nuclear Weapons," dated 17 January 1974. NSDM 242 instructed the Director of Central Intelligence to "prepare a special assessment of likely Soviet and PRC reactions to the new policies, and how these might be influenced by US statements and actions."

The study covers Soviet and Chinese reactions to date to the revised US nuclear employment policy, discusses ways of influencing further reactions, and contains an analysis of the likely evolution of Soviet and PRC nuclear policy and force posture regarding selective uses of nuclear weapons. It was prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency in collaboration with the Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the Department of State, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Agency.

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US Nuclear Weapon Employment Policy

National Security Decision Memorandum 242, "Policy for Planning the Employment of Nuclear Weapons", instructed the Director of Central Intelligence to prepare "a special assessment of likely Soviet and PRC reactions to the new policies, and how these might be influenced by US statements and actions."

This assessment is based on an extensive supporting analysis which examines Soviet and PRC policies, doctrines, and military forces pertinent to the limited employment of nuclear weapons; explores their possible evolution in the future; examines Soviet and PRC reactions to date to recent US policy statements on the limited use of nuclear weapons; and considers means by which the US might influence these reactions.

THE MOST IMPORTANT CONCLUSIONS OF THIS ASSESSMENT ARE:

- 1. Soviet military planners began as early as 1970 to examine possible options for the limited or selective employment of nuclear weapons in theater conflict, but the extent to which such options are part of current Soviet military plans is unknown.*

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2. *Current Soviet military posture provides some capabilities for limited employment of nuclear weapons at theater and intercontinental levels, but is deficient in several key respects.*
3. *Over the next ten years, evolving Soviet doctrine and projected force improvements will permit improved plans and capabilities for some kinds of limited nuclear operations, particularly for theater warfare; the Soviets are less likely to adopt limited use concepts for intercontinental nuclear operations. Plans for massive strikes will remain predominant at both the theater and intercontinental levels.*
4. *Soviet commentary on the revised US nuclear employment policy has been sparse but hostile, while the Chinese have commented more favorably.*
5. *Future Soviet and Chinese reactions to US nuclear weapons employment plans will depend far more upon their evaluations of actual or impending changes in US military capabilities than upon public pronouncements.*

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~~TOP SECRET~~SOVIET AND CHINESE COMMENTARY ON THE REVISED US NUCLEAR EMPLOYMENT POLICY

US enunciation of revised nuclear weapons employment policies in early 1974 has generated sparse and generally hostile Soviet official and unofficial comment. Soviet critics have seen in these US pronouncements an intent to find "acceptable" modes of waging nuclear war, to rationalize new counterforce weapons, and to weaken detente. In general, the Soviets appear to be most concerned with US interest in nuclear planning flexibility and the related improvements in strategic capabilities as negative factors in US-Soviet political and arms control relations. The scarcity of Soviet comment on the substance of US pronouncements to date may stem from the belief, expressed by some in private, that they represent little that is new in US policy. Soviet comments may also be tempered by the knowledge of some senior military officials that, at least for theater nuclear operations, Soviet planners are considering similar policies. Diplomatic considerations probably also restrained Soviet comment prior to the June 1974 Summit.

The Soviets' reactions to the announced revisions in US nuclear employment policy have almost certainly been conditioned by the priority the Soviets assign to maintaining the momentum of East-West political detente. Their reactions are also likely to

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reflect their belief that US declaratory policy on nuclear weapons employment is a subordinate element in the overall correlation of forces between the US and the USSR.

Chinese reactions to the new US strategy have also been few and, in contrast to Soviet comment, appear generally favorable. The Chinese interpret the US policy as having little direct impact on their own nuclear posture or on overall Sino-American relations. Instead, they see the policy as designed to strengthen the US military position against the USSR and as evidence of continuing superpower hostility despite detente. The Chinese are also likely to view the policy as bolstering the US commitment to Western Europe. Because China sees the USSR as posing the principal threat to its security, the Chinese leaders can be expected to regard the new US strategy as indirectly furthering, or at least not opposing, Chinese aims. Nevertheless, Peking has indicated skepticism regarding the feasibility of controlling escalation through limited nuclear operations.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE SOVIET AND CHINESE REACTIONS

The objectives of US efforts to influence Soviet and Chinese reactions are indicated in NSDM 242 and related documentation:

- sufficient understanding of the policy to add to deterrence of Soviet or Chinese threats against the US and its allies.

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- sufficient understanding and reciprocation or imitation of the new policy to enhance the prospects of escalation control and conflict termination should deterrence fail and nuclear weapons have to be employed.
- prevention of undesirable "side effects", primarily for the peacetime US-Soviet nuclear arms relationship, arms control negotiations, and the overall US-Soviet political relationship.

US efforts to influence Soviet and Chinese reactions to US nuclear weapons employment policy and the evolution of their policies will be limited by such factors as each country's international position, basic trends in military technology, and domestic ideological, historical, and institutional contexts. But what the US actually does in force development and acquisition to augment its nuclear strike capabilities will have more influence on the Soviets and the Chinese than what we say.

For Soviet and Chinese planners a basic motive for considering options to limit nuclear operations is likely to be their awareness of the awesome destructiveness of general nuclear war. US policies calling for increased US nuclear employment flexibility will probably enhance Soviet and Chinese incentives to consider similar policies. They will tend to regard US declarations on

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nuclear weapons employment as not prescriptive for, but nevertheless indicative of, likely trends in US arms policy. Thus, while the Soviets and Chinese will be attentive to communications through diplomatic channels, arms control negotiations and official statements, and by the content of public debates on US nuclear policy, they will be more influenced by changes in US military exercises and force structure.

Influencing the Soviets will depend on their general understanding of US willingness to use nuclear weapons in a limited manner combined with some Soviet uncertainty as to precisely how the US would employ them. The Soviets are already aware of the revised US nuclear employment policy as a result of the extensive public discussion in the US which has accompanied its exposition by Secretary Schlesinger. Nevertheless, Soviet policymakers probably remain uncertain about the implications of Dr. Schlesinger's statements. The US and USSR could engage in more explicit discussions on the implications of nuclear employment flexibility in order to enhance Soviet understanding of the current US policy. However, a detailed discussion of acceptable nuclear warfare scenarios with the Soviets could easily detract from the main, i.e., deterrent, intent of US policy by seeming to make limited nuclear

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conflict fully predictable and thus facilitate the planning of Soviet countermeasures to US limited nuclear operations. Even in this forum, the US position would be subject to misinterpretation or, at the very least, to propagandistic distortion with adverse affects for deterrence, crisis management, US-NATO relations, and stability in the arms competition. In any case, if recent history is any guide, such discussions would be unlikely to elicit much useful information on Soviet weapons employment planning.

Sparse evidence in doctrinal sources as well as augmentation of Soviet forward-based nuclear delivery means hint at the possibility that the Soviets could come to see merit in the concept of sanctuary for US and Soviet territory in connection with a European nuclear conflict. US policy on nuclear flexibility may enhance the currency of this concept among Soviet planners. Soviet views on the efficacy of the sanctuary concept will, to some extent, be influenced by the manner in which the US addresses allied concerns on this issue.

The US is unlikely to have much influence over Soviet contingency planning for nuclear operations against China. Soviet willingness to implement these plans, however, should be subject to significant influence by the US, unless China behaves in a

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manner that actually provokes attack. The main deterrent to Soviet actions against China, after the fear of Chinese retaliations itself, is likely to be Soviet concern about international, particularly, US reactions. Here the state of US-Chinese relations is far more crucial than the specific content of US nuclear weapons employment policy.

Most importantly, the Soviets will probably continue to regard US nuclear flexibility as enhancing US interest in counter-silo capabilities. Soviet commentary has pointedly asserted a linkage between flexible nuclear employment options and improved US counterforce capabilities which constitute a threat to strategic stability and to arms control. At present, we cannot confidently predict whether unilateral US restraint in acquiring counter-silo capability on the one hand or expressed US determination to match perceived Soviet counter-silo capability on the other will make the Soviets more willing to accept arms limitations in this area.

The ability of the US to influence Chinese reactions to the new US nuclear employment policy, will probably be constrained by Chinese perceptions of the policy as applying mainly to the USSR, and by Chinese awareness of the limitations of their nuclear forces. Over time, the Chinese are likely to be concerned that the new concept and the military capabilities implicit in

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it may make the US more willing to employ nuclear weapons against China than might otherwise be the case, but the degree of such concern will undoubtedly be influenced much more by the state of Sino-American and Sino-Soviet political relations than by changes in US strategic doctrine.

CURRENT SOVIET DOCTRINE ON LIMITED NUCLEAR EMPLOYMENT

Evidence on Soviet doctrine and planning for strategic inter-continental conflict continues to emphasize a massive, unlimited exchange of weapons targeted on military and industrial resources.

Throughout the 1960s, Soviet declaratory policy and military doctrine were explicitly hostile to any concepts involving the limited employment of nuclear weapons. There is some evidence, however, that since 1969-1970 Soviet planners have been tasked to study concepts for limited employment of nuclear weapons in theater warfare. Plans for such employment may be under development or available in addition to traditional massive employment options.

Past Soviet hostility to concepts of limited nuclear conflict apparently rested on the belief that nuclear escalation could not

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be controlled, that Soviet forces could not prevail in limited nuclear conflict, and that deterrence would be enhanced by stressing the unlimited consequences of any nuclear employment. During the mid-1960s, Soviet doctrine accommodated to the concept of a conventional phase in a European conflict both in response to NATO's policy of "flexible response" and to exploit growing military confidence in the ability of their conventional forces. Recent suggestions of Soviet interest in limited nuclear employment options at the theater level may reflect the need to respond to NATO policies as well as growing Soviet confidence in their nuclear capabilities at the theater and strategic levels.

In recent years there has been only the most general discussion of guidelines for the conduct of intercontinental war in available Soviet military writings. The scattered references available suggest that the strategy enunciated in the 1960s continues to prevail. Available doctrinal sources provide virtually no evidence that limited strategic operations are being considered at the intercontinental level. They have spoken instead of a massive salvo directed against a wide range of US military, political, and economic targets.

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~~TOP SECRET~~LIKELY EVOLUTION OF SOVIET NUCLEAR EMPLOYMENT DOCTRINE

It appears most likely that Soviet interest in concepts of limited nuclear employment will be for theater nuclear conflicts around the Soviet periphery. In the European theater, we expect that the role of the initial, massive theater-wide nuclear strike will remain paramount in Soviet planning. However, the Soviets can be expected also to provide for a range of contingencies which could include:

- very selective use of small numbers of nuclear weapons against battlefield targets or, less likely, for demonstrative effect. The Soviets may think of this kind of option as an appropriate mode of response to NATO's selective use of nuclear weapons, both to deny NATO a possible local military advantage and to present a symbolic counter to an option in which NATO rests great hope.
- options that withhold nuclear weapons against selected NATO countries, among which France is the leading candidate. Implementation of such options would call for adjustments in theater targeting to

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withhold attacks on states that the Soviets wish to "factor out" of a European conflict.

- options for large scale theater nuclear attacks without using forces based in the USSR. Tenuous doctrinal evidence plus inferences drawn from observed Soviet augmentation of forward-based strike resources in Europe suggest that the Soviets may already be interested in a sanctuary option for the territory of the USSR. Their strategic interest in such an option would be natural; their belief that they could make it work -- i.e., keep a large-scale NATO-Warsaw Pact nuclear exchange out of Soviet territory -- is much less certain.

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A second theater for which the Soviets are likely to develop nuclear attack options that appear limited to the US at least, if not to the intended victim, is China. The Soviets would probably provide themselves with basically two classes of attack options against China. The first would be essentially a counterforce attack plan against Chinese nuclear forces and installations, air defenses, and ground force concentrations; the second, a counter-urban/industrial attack plan, could be implemented independently or in conjunction with the counterforce operation. The Soviets would probably desire at least this degree of nuclear employment flexibility to allow for deterrence of Chinese retaliation against Soviet cities with any nuclear strike capabilities that survive a Soviet counterforce attack and to minimize the adverse reaction of the US and other bystanders to a Sino-Soviet conflict. Beyond these two classes of options, the Soviets might provide themselves with the option of using tactical nuclear weapons solely against battlefield targets in a local situation dominated by Chinese conventional forces manpower, e.g., opposite the Soviet maritime provinces.

The Soviets will probably develop what could be termed limited nuclear employment options for a third theater, that is the naval theater. The Soviets set high store in an ability to engage US and NATO naval capabilities in parallel with both

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conventional and nuclear conflicts in Europe. This may give them a particular incentive to decouple operations against land and sea targets. They may believe that a low level nuclear conflict in Europe could be kept from escalating even while fairly extensive nuclear operations took place at sea, because the latter would not involve civilian damage and because nuclear conflict at sea might convey the image of restraint owing to the rather slow pace at which some naval targets, notably submarines, could be located and engaged.

During the next ten years the Soviets are likely to give precedence to plans for limited nuclear operations against peripheral targets, although they could also adopt concepts for the limited use of nuclear weapons in intercontinental operations.

Soviet planners will probably continue to believe that among the many conceivable forms of limited nuclear war, exchanges involving the central territory of the two superpowers are least likely to remain limited. The legacy of past Soviet doctrinal aversion to limited nuclear conflict will make it difficult for the Soviet military planning and theoretical apparatus to adopt this notion. Further, while Soviet forces will have inherent capabilities for limited intercontinental nuclear operations, they may remain inferior to those of the US for some time to come.

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Nevertheless, should the USSR acquire in its modernized ICBM force what it perceives to be an effective counterforce capability against a substantial portion of US silo-based ICBMs, Soviet strategic employment plans would probably make provisions for such an option.

PRESENT SOVIET CAPABILITIES FOR LIMITED NUCLEAR OPERATIONS

Present Soviet military forces display some inherent potential for the employment of nuclear weapons in a limited or selective manner; but they suffer from important deficiencies. In a theater conflict, Soviet forward-based nuclear strike forces could execute selective nuclear attacks against fixed or preplanned targets near the battle lines, but they are not well structured for the kind of low intensity nuclear operations envisioned by some NATO plans. They are deficient in potential for deep-strike operations, precision delivery, and penetration of unsuppressed defenses. Soviet peripheral attack strategic systems, such as USSR-based medium bombers or MR/IRBMs, could compensate for range deficiencies of forward-based systems but only at the price of involving Soviet territory.

Soviet forces for intercontinental nuclear attack -- ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers -- appear intended for use in a brief unrestrained nuclear exchange. While these forces could be used for limited attacks, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] does not indicate that the Soviets currently plan to employ these forces in a limited or restrained manner. These forces present uneven capabilities to serve as an enduring deterrent against escalation to unrestrained attacks during a conflict involving limited uses of strategic weapons. However, the Soviets' ICBMs alone, because of their numbers, hardness, dispersal, and state of alert, have good capabilities to meet this requirement. Soviet active air defenses as well as civil defenses could possibly play an important role in limited nuclear conflict by reducing damage from small attacks or foreclosing certain enemy limited attack options.

Present Soviet battle management capabilities are almost certainly lacking in near real time target acquisition, rapid attack planning and attack assessment required to participate in large scale or prolonged limited theater or intercontinental nuclear operations. Their capabilities are probably adequate to support very limited nuclear attacks of short duration against preplanned targets along the Soviet periphery or in the US.

LIKELY EVOLUTION OF SOVIET CAPABILITIES FOR LIMITED NUCLEAR EMPLOYMENT

The likely qualitative improvements in future Soviet forces will enhance their inherent capabilities for limited nuclear operations in theater or intercontinental war, regardless of Soviet views about the feasibility of selective use options.

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- Improvement in the number and quality of tactical nuclear delivery systems in the forward area, especially high performance strike aircraft, will afford the Soviets better capabilities to conduct deep-strike or battlefield nuclear attacks from non-Soviet territory.
- Soviet ICBM modernization programs will provide more weapons (MIRVs) for possible employment in limited nuclear operations, more accuracy for higher expected damage and possibly less collateral damage, and added flexibility as to range and azimuth of employment.
- Harder ICBM silos and larger SLBM forces will add to the enduring survivability of Soviet intercontinental attack forces as an intra-war deterrent to unrestrained nuclear warfare.
- Soviet battle-management capabilities for limited nuclear operations are also likely to improve. Soviet military authorities have identified automated battle management at all levels as a technological priority; but Soviet deficiencies in computational, sensor, and communications technology seem likely to inhibit their progress.

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PRESENT AND PROJECTED CHINESE POLICY AND POSTURE FOR NUCLEAR WARFARE

Chinese nuclear strategy rests upon a modest deterrent posture against all potential threats. Peking has uniformly asserted that its nuclear forces are exclusively defensive and would be employed only in retaliation.

present deployments suggest a mixed strategy based on countervalue targeting of Soviet and Asian cities and on key military targets along the Chinese periphery or against invading armies on its own territory.

To hedge against the failure of deterrence, Peking probably has developed contingency plans to employ its nuclear weapons in a restrained manner, in that an unlimited nuclear exchange would have catastrophic consequences for China. China's forces are sufficient to provide for limited use options from within its modest inventory, although Chinese statements have shown no evidence of interest in selective employment. From the standpoint of the US or USSR, any Chinese nuclear attack would be limited. China is almost certain to exercise great restraint before resorting to the use of nuclear weapons because she would invite devastating retaliation against her remaining forces and major urban and industrial centers. Although the difficulty of locating and destroying

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all of its nuclear forces would probably enable China to threaten some nuclear retaliation in all circumstances, Chinese leaders probably believe that initiating the use of nuclear weapons would be a last resort.

Chinese nuclear forces are likely to grow slowly over the next several years, but these improvements would not support any major change in the current Chinese nuclear strategy. While Peking will probably acquire a small intercontinental capability by the late 1970s which will allow it to threaten the US and the European USSR, China's nuclear capabilities will remain overwhelmingly inferior relative to the superpowers. China's first priority will almost certainly remain the avoidance of nuclear conflict. ~~(TOP SECRET)~~ [REDACTED]

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